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## Review of *Psychoanalysis and Black Novels: Desire and the Protocols of Race* by Claudia Tate

Diane Hoeveler

Marquette University, [diane.hoeveler@marquette.edu](mailto:diane.hoeveler@marquette.edu)

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as the transmission of ancestral energies, and the healing potential of “fixing ceremonies,” their inclusion in this anthology is not a vaguely idealized gesture to silence critics. The theoretical potential of the spiritual is subjected to the same intellectual scrutiny by the editors as are the essays in the rest of the text.

This book will interest practitioners of several schools of psychoanalytic theory and will best serve those who are working to resolve their traditional shortcomings. Those who are skeptical but still receptive to the probity of psychoanalysis will also be interested in these thought-provoking essays, since they do not try to deny incompatibilities or force any reconciliations. However, there is an inverse relationship between historical specificity and psychoanalytic terminology which, had it been explained, would have fortified the editors’ intentions. Therefore, hard and fast materialists will likely remain unconvinced of the merits of analyzing black female subjectivity in this way. Nevertheless, the depth and range of this valuable collection demonstrates that feminist, Marxist, and formalist schools of literary and cultural criticism are indebted, to some extent, to psychoanalytic theories of the ways in which the human subject conceives of, and experiences, the unconscious, the body, and the world through language.

Claudia Tate’s new book signals a welcome coming-of-age of African American literary criticism. Long immersed in what Tate herself refers to as a critical tradition that “demanded that a black text explicitly represent its lived experiences with racial oppression,” black novels have been read primarily as social, political, or historical documents. But to do so, as Tate persuasively argues, has been to ignore the universal and psychological depths that black fictions embody as thoroughly as any literature written by human beings must. Tate contends that scholars of African American literature have “produced a black literary canon in which the politics of race forms the manifest text; at the same time, they have repressed problematic personal discourses of desire.” *Psychoanalysis and Black Novels* uncovers and carefully dissects these “discourses of desire”—largely pre-oedipal and oedipal motifs in Emma Kelley’s *Megda*, W. E. B. Du Bois’s *Dark Princess*, Richard Wright’s *Savage Holiday*, Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand*, and Zora Neale Hurston’s *Seraph on the Suwanee*.

By focusing on five African American novels that have been largely marginalized from the canonical tradition, Tate reveals that black authors have encoded their neuroses as thoroughly in their works as has any other group of writers. But the literary establishment—both white and black literary critics—has been loath to acknowledge or even recognize obvious signs of psychological import in black novels, largely in what appears to be an attempt to categorize (and easily relegate?) African American literature as largely racial and social propaganda. Tate’s carefully researched and defined study examines the personal life of each of these authors, revealing the ambiguous and ambivalent relationships they each had with their parents—relationships that in turn created the need in these texts to explore their innermost psychic traumas in the struggles of their white characters (who serve as highly displaced versions of themselves).

Tate acknowledges that these novels have been largely ignored because critics and readers have not been comfortable reading what amounts to a black nov-

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Claudia Tate. *Psychoanalysis and Black Novels: Desire and the Protocols of Race*. New York: Oxford UP, 1998. 238 pp. \$45.00 cloth/\$19.95 paper.

Reviewed by

Diane Long Hoeveler  
*Marquette University*

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elist's displacement of his or her own personal anxieties onto unconvincing white or mixed-race characters. The larger issue that Tate confronts, however, is whether black novelists will ever be allowed to possess the same sort of inner psychic life that white writers are routinely acknowledged to possess. Thus, we have a discussion of Du Bois that recognizes his displaced guilt for the death of his mother: In *Dark Princess* we see a "heavily concealed, much displaced, unconscious desire to exclude the social world and re-embrace the dyadic union with the sovereign dark matriarch, who is yet another displacement for the lost and clearly omnipotent mother." The discussion of Wright is similarly intriguing, uncovering the "infantile sadistic fantasies" that cause the white hero of *Savage Holiday* to kill a neighboring woman in a substitutive fantasy of matricide. Wright's case is particularly interesting because he created so many works that explore "his recurring and yet unacknowledged fantasy of the sexually betraying mother, a fantasy that forms the core of the subjective dynamics of all of Wright's fictions."

The discussions of Larsen, Kelley, and Hurston—as female writers—tend to focus on their relationships with their fathers, as one might expect. The chapter on Larsen and the search for the lost father is particularly insightful, but Tate might well have more fully developed the discussion of rape fantasies in Hurston's novel. In each of these chapters Tate uncovers what she calls the intersection of desire with black textuality at the "tabooed site of black sexuality":

Each of these novels in this book suffers from eruptions of desire that are external to racial and/or social narratives and generate serious logical problems for the novels. We could even say that the dis-ease is fatal in almost every instance. The eruptions inhabit the novels' sexual tropes and obscure the works' social argument.

But surely readers of serious fiction are accustomed to expect and appreciate "eruptions" of personal and psychic content, and certainly no one expects or demands that every fiction written by members of any ethnic group must be a form of "social argument." By resurrecting these largely marginal texts, Tate has performed a valuable service. But her greater contribution has been to bring a sensitive and sophisticated voice to a larger issue: the universality of black fiction and black authors.

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Aimable Twagilimana. *Race and Gender in the Making of an African American Literary Tradition*. New York: Garland, 1997. 206 pp. \$46.00.

Reviewed by

Leslie W. Lewis  
*The College of St. Rose*

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**B**illed as an examination of the ways that race and gender have shaped and informed African American literature, this book and its title catch the eye. Further, the scope of this study is ambitious: Twagilimana promises to present "close interdisciplinary readings of early African American texts," including work by Phillis Wheatley, Olaudah Equiano, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Harriet Wilson, and Zora Neale Hurston. However, closer examination of her argument and intent uncover a basic and inherent problem: the tautology at its core. While this study sets out to show the *whys* and *hows* of the ideologies of race and gender in African American literary texts, it soon collapses into a study

that simply shows that African American literature *is* racialized—and gendered. I suppose I can imagine a context in which this point needs to be argued, but within African American literary scholarship it seems a given. Who, at this